

SUMMARY OF THE PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING JUNE 19, 2001

The Proficiency Testing (PT) Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met by teleconference on Tuesday, June 19, 2001, at 1:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT). The meeting was led by its chair, Ms. Barbara Burmeister of the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The purpose of the meeting was to review highlights, substantive issues, and future plans identified in the Seventh NELAC Annual Meeting (NELAC 7) PT session and to address comments and questions received from NELAC stakeholders.*

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Burmeister began the meeting by welcoming participants and recognizing new committee members Dr. John Griggs, Dr. Tom McAninch, and Dr. Michael Miller. She then reviewed the minutes from the committee's May 8, 2001 teleconference and May 22, 2001 face-to-face meeting at NELAC 7. Ms. Burmeister noted that she had prepared the May 8 teleconference minutes during a lapse in contractor support. In subsequent discussion of the May 8 minutes it was noted that ranges given for the list of analyte codes have changed. The committee agreed that the May 8 minutes should not be amended since the analyte code ranges were correct at that time. The committee agreed that the May 8, 2001 and May 22, 2001 minutes are final. The status of Action Items from the two meetings is as follows:

May 8, 2001 teleconference

- Ms. Burmeister contacted Mr. Chuck Wibby with the specifications for the master analyte code tables.
- Ms. Burmeister made changes to Section 2.1.3 of the NELAC Standard and to the Safe Drinking Water Act (SWDA)/NELAC PT requirement Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and submitted these to Ms. Jeanne Hankins for inclusion in the NELAC 7 meeting packets.
- Ms. Burmeister distributed the draft Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the annual review of PT fields of testing to the committee. The draft SOP was presented at NELAC 7.

May 22, 2001 NELAC 7 PT Session

- The PT Committee is committed to working with the Program Policy and Structure (Chapter 1) Committee on the definition of analyte groups.
- The PT Committee will work with the Accrediting Authority Workgroup to define a uniform electronic reporting format. Ms. Burmeister will contact the workgroup to ask that she and this issue be included on the agenda for an upcoming teleconference.
- The PT Data Reporting and Scoring FAQs have been updated and posted on the NELAC website.
- The PT Committee will post revised field of proficiency testing tables on the NELAC website after further committee discussion. Since the tables are revised only once a year, the committee wants each revision to be as complete as possible.

REVIEW OF NELAC 7 PT SESSION

Noting that the NELAC 7 summary overheads for each committee are available for review on the NELAC Website, Ms. Burmeister led the committee in a review of the highlights and substantive issues from their session at NELAC 7.

Data Reporting and Scoring FAQs

The NELAC PT Data Reporting and Scoring FAQs have been updated to resolve inconsistencies with the NELAC Board of Directors' (BoD's) policy on NELAC PT requirements, which states that any indication of nondetect for analytes that have an assigned value of zero will be considered acceptable. The updated FAQs have been posted on the NELAC Website.

PT Reporting Limits

Ms. Burmeister explained that as a result of new language added to Chapter 2 and the NELAC Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) PT Fields of Testing table some laboratories felt that they must guess whether an analyte had been spiked into a PT sample. Consequently the PT Committee has proposed that NELAC publish a list of PT Reporting Limits (PTRLs) to be included with the PT Fields of Testing tables. Ms. Burmeister further explained that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Standards for Water Proficiency Testing Studies Criteria Document allows the reporting of zero for PT results. The NELAC BoD policy on the evaluation of PT results is consistent with the National Standards for Water Proficiency Testing Studies Criteria Document. The PT Committee, however, feels that it is not scientifically defensible to report zero. Until the National Standards for Water Proficiency Testing Studies Criteria Document is revised, PT providers must allow a zero to stand. Ms. Burmeister noted that the PT Committee must find a mechanism for communicating with EPA on this and other issues. She briefly reviewed three options for the publication of PTRLs in which the committee could include reporting limits for only non-EPA analytes, reporting limits for all analytes, or reporting limits for all analytes with EPA analytes called out for special note. The committee asked for time to review the options before making a decision. Ms. Burmeister agreed to e-mail committee members three PT Fields of Testing tables including an extra column for PTRLs. The committee deferred further discussion of the issue to their next teleconference.

Uniform Electronic Reporting Format

Ms. Burmeister noted that she will ask the Accrediting Authority Workgroup to include her on the agenda for a future teleconference to discuss uniform electronic reporting format. Dr. Miller offered to broach the topic as a member of the workgroup at the end of their next teleconference, time permitting. He noted that it will be easier to set a uniform reporting format if the accrediting authorities adopt standardized method and analyte codes. The PT Committee hopes that non-NELAC states and PT providers also adopt these codes eventually.

Method and Analyte Codes

Ms. Burmeister e-mailed draft analyte codes to the states of Kansas, Florida, New Hampshire, and Oregon and to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) for their review

and comments. She hopes to finalize the codes within the next week. Ms. Burmeister noted that the committee will work on technology codes after the analyte codes have been finalized and that they will eventually achieve their goal of a uniform scope of accreditation.

Definition of Analyte Groups

Ms. Burmeister reminded the committee of their NELAC 7 Action Item to work with the Program Policy and Structure Committee on the definition of analyte groups. There was general committee agreement that the PT Committee should take the lead on a PT/Program Policy and Structure collaboration by developing draft analyte groups and presenting them to the Program Policy and Structure Committee for their review. Ms. Burmeister asked for volunteers to work together to make a first attempt at drafting the analyte groups. Ms. RaeAnn Haynes, Dr. Anand Mudambi, Dr. Ralph Obenauf, and Dr. Miller agreed to serve on the task group. Ms. Burmeister suggested that they communicate via e-mail and that they submit a basic draft for committee review by the PT Committee's August 7, 2001 teleconference. A few committee members indicated that the analyte groups should be technology based. In subsequent discussion of the issue Dr. Miller noted at least five different analyte groups as follows:

- Regulated
- Unregulated (listed in the Code of Federal Regulations)
- Miscellaneous (as in EPA Method 524.2 for volatile organic compounds in drinking water)
- Pesticides (as in EPA Method 625 for semivolatile compounds in water and soils)
- Herbicides

Dr Miller noted that some of these analyte groups, especially organics, are method-defined. The first three groups are primarily defined by drinking water methods while the last two groups are defined within other methods. He asked how the committee proposes to approach the definition of analyte groups. Another committee member suggested that the task group must consider the influence of prep method regardless of whether the analyte groups are technology-based or method-based. There was spirited discussion of this issue. Ms. Burmeister suggested that the task group will take into consideration what makes sense from a PT standpoint, what makes sense from an accreditation standpoint, what makes sense from an analysis standpoint, and what is currently on the Fields of Proficiency Testing list and available from PT Providers. Noting that only two states currently accredit by preparation method, she suggested that the task group will focus on the determinative aspects of methods first and then gather data on preparation methods.

Revised Fields of Proficiency Testing Tables

The committee deferred discussion of this issue for their next teleconference.

REVIEW OF NELAC 7 FUTURE PLANS

Continue the PT Subcommittee on Implementation and Standardization

Ms. Burmeister suggested early to mid-October 2001 for a face-to-face meeting of the PT Subcommittee in conjunction with a PT Committee face-to-face meeting.

Work With the EPA to Revise the National Standards for Water Proficiency Testing Studies Criteria Document

Ms. Burmeister explained that the National Standards for Water Proficiency Testing Studies Criteria Document was developed so that NIST would have something against which to accredit PT Providers. It was never finalized or published in the Federal Register. She suggested that the current need for revision may provide the perfect opportunity to incorporate the National Standards Criteria Document as a NELAC document with the cooperation of EPA. Ms. Burmeister will write a letter to Mr. James Hanlon, Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator of EPA's Office of Water, regarding revision of the National Standards for Water Proficiency Testing Studies Criteria Document.

Explore the Possibility of Creating a Permanent Subcommittee of Technical Experts to Evaluate Acceptance Criteria and Monitor Performance

Ms. Burmeister explained her vision of the formation of a permanent ongoing subcommittee of technical experts. This group would evaluate current proficiency testing acceptance criteria and could be used as a mechanism to introduce new data into the process. By introducing data reflective of what is currently happening rather than just historical data, the subcommittee can recommend more realistic acceptance criteria. She cited as an example the acceptance criteria for orthophosphate. It was acknowledged that not all current members of the standing PT Committee have the technical expertise necessary to accomplish the task. Ms. Burmeister explained that the committee must request NELAC BoD approval to establish a subcommittee with membership outside the membership of the standing NELAC committee. She shared a list of supportive documentation that should be submitted to the BoD with the request for approval. Ms. Burmeister indicated that she will produce a draft proposal to e-mail to the PT Committee for their review and comment. In discussion of the potential makeup of the permanent subcommittee it was suggested that the subcommittee should include representatives from PT providers, accrediting authorities, laboratories (the Quality Assurance Officer of a larger laboratory, for example), statisticians, and EPA representatives. Ms. Burmeister suggested that the early to mid-October 2001 timeframe suggested for a face-to-face meeting of the PT Subcommittee on Implementation and Standardization and the PT Committee would also be appropriate for a face-to-face meeting with the permanent subcommittee of technical experts.

SOP SUBCOMMITTEE STATUS

Draft SOP for Annual Review of PT Fields of Testing Tables

Ms. Burmeister noted a conflict between Section 6.1 and Section 6.2 of this SOP. The subcommittee is proposing to delete Section 6.2 and to revisit the issue of time period.

SOP for Adding Method Codes and Analyte Codes to Tables

This SOP is currently under development.

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS RECEIVED

The committee addressed a question received from Dr. Miller regarding the starting date for the routine semi-annual PT schedule. It was suggested that the starting date for the PT schedule is tied to the date of application for accreditation. In subsequent discussion it was noted that laboratories agree to work within the NELAC process when they submit their application for accreditation. Laboratories are required to be enrolled in a semi-annual PT program when they apply for accreditation.

CONCLUSION

With little time remaining, the committee agreed to defer discussion of other issues until their next teleconference. The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m. EDT as the allotted teleconference time expired. The committee's next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 17, 2001 via teleconference.

**ACTION ITEMS
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
JUNE 19, 2001**

Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Ms. Burmeister will e-mail committee members three PT Fields of Testing tables for their review and discussion of PTRL options at the next teleconference.	July 17, 2001
2.	Ms. Burmeister will ask the Accrediting Authority Workgroup to include her on the agenda for a future teleconference to discuss uniform electronic reporting format.	
3.	PT Committee will finalize draft analyte codes.	June 26, 2001
4.	Ms. Haynes, Dr. Mudambi, Dr. Obenauf, and Dr. Miller will coordinate to draft proposed analyte groups for committee review.	August 7, 2001
8.	PT Committee will include revised Fields of Proficiency Testing tables on the agenda for next teleconference.	July 17, 2001
9.	Ms. Burmeister will draft a proposal to request approval from the NELAC BoD to establish a permanent subcommittee of technical experts. She will e-mail the draft to the PT Committee for their review.	
10.	Ms. Burmeister will write a letter to Mr. James Hanlon, Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator of EPA's Office of Water, regarding revision of the National Standards for Water Proficiency Testing Studies Criteria Document	
11.	The SOP Subcommittee will continue to work on the draft SOP for Annual Review of PT Fields of Testing Tables.	
12.	The SOP Subcommittee will prepare a draft SOP for Adding Method Codes and Analyte Codes to Tables.	

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PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
JUNE 19, 2001**

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